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THE MUSICAL TIMES, And Singing Class Circular.

FEBRUARY 1st, 1857.

TRUTH ABOUT MUSIC & MUSICIANS.

LETTER IV.—WEBER.

Translated from the German by SABILLA NOVELLO.

CARL MARIA VON WEBER (*born in Eutin, 1786, died in London, 5th June, 1826*). Up to the time of Beethoven, all the resources of musical art seemed gradually concentrating; separate beauties harmoniously united, and breathed on by vivifying genius, formed a perfect whole; but from his time we may trace symptoms of decay and disruption in this glorious edifice, even though supported by worthy efforts. We must not lose sight of this clue, which shews us how imperceptibly Art declines, and warns us what to avoid even in the models offered us by great masters, if we would sustain Art at its highest point. My deceased friend, the talented Weber, is one of those masters who furnish such a clue. Heaven had gifted him with rare capacity; he possessed all the qualities which form a great musician: a quick, impressible understanding, an extraordinarily lively imagination and creative power, with pure noble taste. If we compare him with his great predecessors, we are struck by one great difference between them and himself: during his youth, he did not decidedly and exclusively devote himself to music; on the contrary, his mind was attracted by many things, not merely for amusement, but with a desire of invention. He drew, he painted,—he fancied he had discovered lithography, and even wished to enter business and speculate with this invention. Thus a considerable period of his youth was wasted, and his true vocation delayed. He could never obtain strict and steady instruction, especially as, with his father, he constantly changed his residence, led an interrupted life, and could only snatch occasional learning during the early years, best adapted for study. All that was wanting in steady and continuous instruction in youth, he partly regained under the tuition of Abbe Vogler, by persevering industry, and especially by his quick observation and clear understanding. I say "*partly*," for he never became completely master of *Form*, as Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Spohr, and others did; and on this account his greatest failing is want of *form*. This has never been sufficiently acknowledged, and unfortunately the result is, that many scholars, through his example, have been led to neglect form. He was also wanting in the art of working out thematic instrumental compositions, or, at least, did not seem to recognise its utility, and never thoroughly excelled in it as have, among the moderns, Spohr and Mendelssohn. On this account, he never succeeded in forming

from one principal subject, by means of artistic science, an entire work and self-contained whole. Some of his instrumental pieces certainly contain scattered thematic transformations, but they always betray his deficiency in the practice of this branch of art, and therefore do not possess the charm of true thematic working out, which consists in great similarity to the principal subject combined with individual diversity. The inevitable result is, that his instrumental works, in which he employs too many new, disconnected ideas, give them an appearance of having *been put together*; and we know that every work of Art, like a work of Nature, should be self-contained, and possess organised unity. This defect is observable in his sonatas, his symphonies, and most especially in his overtures, which, as regards their technical form, are nothing more than a succession of bright pictures, following each other at hazard, and only connected by an occasional repetition of the principal subject;—they scarcely display the slightest trace of thematic unity, in their organic formation, or natural sequential development. Compare in this light the overtures of Mozart, Beethoven and Spohr, with those of Weber; select from them all the successive subjects, and you will by this method perceive from how few ideas the first-named masters formed a whole, and, on the other hand, how many short themes Weber is obliged to employ and assemble in order to produce an overture.

As imitators always copy the weak points of a master, being the easiest to remark and reproduce, this has been the case with regard to Weber, who set the fashion of those disconnected, lightly concocted opera-overtures, formed from the most heterogeneous ideas and melodies in the opera, well or ill combined. One disadvantage of such proceeding is that, for instance, *Allegros* in overtures cannot be written at choice, or consistently with certain sentiments, but always in $\frac{4}{4}$ measure, which is universally adopted for the composition of overtures. On this account, he was *obliged* to introduce from the opera such melodies and themes as were written in this measure, that at least the unity of time and measure might not suffer; thus nothing remained for him to do, but to contrast these subjects as well as possible, according to the rules of light and shade. Since Weber's day, we have been inundated by overtures, which may really rank as mere pot-pourris, while overtures, written in the classical form of Mozart, Beethoven, &c., have almost disappeared. You are, without doubt, ready to remind me that Weber's overtures to *Freischütz*, *Oberon*, *Eury-anthe*, &c., are often and everywhere performed, and always excite true enthusiasm in an audience; this cannot be denied, and I myself, whenever I hear them, feel tears of extacy arise; but nevertheless their form is defective, their powerful, indisputable sway is owing to another cause: the

greater number of themes in these overtures possess a truthful earnestness which goes straight to the heart; besides this, Weber well understood how to choose for each overture some of the most charming, popular melodies in the opera,—how to introduce them repeatedly with effect,—and how to close with grand and glorious orchestral combination. In addition to this, the public has become intimately acquainted with these charming and exciting themes through means of the opera, and can therefore recall the emotions expressed by text,—thus they are as suggestive and interesting as any vivid representation. Recollect, also, the splendid instrumentation, performed admirably, by most orchestras, from long practice; recollect that, by repeated enjoyment, the public is cognisant of each single note, and can thus fully appreciate the tone-picture,—and you will no longer wonder at general enthusiasm.

The want of beautiful form, or rather "*formlessness*," is and ever will be a defect to be avoided by students, the more so, as it is far easier to imitate than are Weber's deeply-poetic expression and soul-stirring themes. His "*formlessness*,"—that is, his unsymmetrical, disconnected, and scrappy style,—is displayed, not only in his overtures, but more or less even in all his operas. For instance, in the melodious and admirably expressive air of Agatha, in the *Freischütz*, the *Allegro*, "Hope again is waking," is constructed of too many separate, organically unconnected phrases; but in it, as in the overture, the want of form is concealed by the repetition of the charming, fascinating melody, "Every doubting fear."

His deficiency in the art of form is most evident in his Finales. Compare the classical architectural structure of Mozart's Finales, which consist of a series of simple, characteristically defined masses, with the ever-changing, disjointed phrases of Weber's Finales,—the difference and the weakness of the latter master will become apparent. One cause for this want in his works is, that he endeavored too minutely to follow each separate thought of the poet, and depict each detail with truth and precision.

Weber has become *great*, even unrivalled, for the *popular* or *national melodies* in his operas. His works are a proof that *melody* alone sways the people, and therefore that those are quite mistaken who neglect melody. Above every thing, Weber rightly studied national melody,—that primæval element of music, found in every human breast; and he has created more beautiful, generally attractive, yet almost always noble, popular music, than any other composer up to the present day. What is still more praiseworthy, he has, with rare moderation and great art, embellished these melodies with *simple* though original and characteristic instrumentation, which at once stamps them what they are. If you would fully understand what I mean by

moderation, examine his Bridesmaid chorus, and his incantation scene. Weber is as great for the individuality of his personage as for his melodies,—in these he may compete with Mozart. Remember Agatha (Agnes) and Annette, Max and Caspar. Not only has he known how to characterise the persons in his operas; he also, like Mozart, gave appropriate coloring to each opera as a whole. How different is *Euryanthe* from *Freischütz*, and this from *Oberon*! Weber has invented several novelties in orchestration,—that is, in novel employment or combination of instruments; an instance of this is the use of the low tones of clarinets to signify and depict the supernatural. This shews us how carefully he endeavored to obtain characteristic coloring,—how deeply he meditated correct expression; in short, how he kept in view the maxim, "An artist should pen no line without reflection." Examine the first best piece of his,—say the *Adagio* of the *Freischütz* overture, which I have already mentioned. The pictures he therein displays did not come to him by inspiration; he *copied* them from reality,—from hunting life,—and portrayed Zamiel's gloomy appearance as every fancy might imagine the supernatural. The same applies to the fairy chorus in the commencement of *Oberon*, and many other of his perfectly original, yet utterly diversified representations, which could only have been the result of mature deliberation. Yet I must now warn you of an error,—an exaggeration, of which Weber is sometimes guilty, in his endeavor after distinct and practical delineation. In his desire to attain *truth*, he occasionally loses *beauty* of form, design, or harmony. Compare, in this light, the description of the approaching serpent in *Euryanthe* and in the *Zauberflöte*; in both, the object is strikingly portrayed, not only its convolutions and advance, but also the dismay of the persons approached by the monster; but in Weber's description there is *only truth*,—the tonal picture has in itself no charm, nay, even makes a disagreeable impression on the ear. Mozart's equally faithful tonal description preserves, even through all its horror and affright, symmetry of form and beauty of harmony.

The *Freischütz* is acknowledged to be Weber's best work, for in it his most excellent qualities predominate, and his weak points are least perceptible. Examine the cause of this, which will be a valuable hint to all young composers who unfortunately are inattentive to these matters. In composing the *Freischütz*, Weber used some self-denial, and strove to gain *public approbation*; although he did not relinquish any of his artistic principles, and endeavored throughout to attain truthfulness, yet he consulted public taste more than usual, and so far gave way to it, as to clothe his work in all the beauties of melody and harmonious instrumentation. The result proved that he acted rightly, and that success is ensured, when a composer, instead of following his own

fancies and caprice, lays them steadily aside, and gives to the people that which a people can like and understand.

In his later works, Weber did not shew himself so entirely a popular writer. The public had crowned him enthusiastically with its applause, and he no longer thought necessary to consult its taste; instead of bending towards the people, he desired to raise the people to himself. Thus *Euryanthe* appeared, but, from the reasons just adduced, did not, and could not, obtain equal success with the *Freischütz*, notwithstanding the many beautiful and great things it contains. In *Oberon*, he hesitated between his own artistic principles and *English* public taste, which he was obliged to consult; his physical weakness and exhaustion also lamed the powers of his intellect; on this account, *Oberon* is his poorest opera, although rich in beautiful fragments. Weber ranks incontestably next to Mozart, as a German opera composer, and none of his successors can be compared to him for truth and beauty of expression,—for clearly defined character and dramatic vividness,—for appropriate and original instrumentation,—for scenic aptitude and stage effect. Young talents who would devote themselves to operatic writing, should therefore especially study Mozart's and Weber's scores, for only when pursuing the paths trodden by these masters,—when developing *new and original ideas*, in the manner that Mozart and Weber did theirs,—can they calculate upon success, which will then, however, be certain.

It is well known that Weber was a celebrated performer on the pianoforte, but the concertos he wrote for his instrument, like those of Spohr for the violin, are valuable as classical, expressive, soul-stirring works of art; they are not, like so many others, merely calculated to display digital celerity and elasticity. He wrote excellently, not only for his own instrument: he was so intimately acquainted with others, that he composed concertos for them; for instance, the clarinet concertos, which he wrote for Bärmann, are perfect models, and enable the performer not only to display execution, but to touch the hearts of an audience by their charming expression and earnest pathos.

I must call your attention to the *author* Weber and his writings; I recommend the perusal of these, which will prove to you how deeply and perseveringly he reflected on the laws of our art,—with what clear cognisance of that which he wished and intended, he created his musical works,—and with what meditation and caution he proceeded to their completion.

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

This Journal is published on the 1st of every month.

The late hour at which Advertisements reach us, interferes much with their proper classification.

All communications must be authenticated by the proper name and address of the writer, not necessarily for publication.

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We would request those who send us country newspapers, wishing us to read particular paragraphs, to mark the passage, by cutting a slit in the paper near it.

We cannot undertake to return offered contributions; the authors, therefore, will do well to retain copies.

A Subscriber, who wishes to obtain certain Dinner Gleees, should enquire at the nearest music shop, and what he requires will no doubt be obtained.

An Amateur enquires the meaning of "Full to Fifteenth," in the "Select Organ Pieces;" it means that all the stops up to and including the "Fifteenth" are to be used.

A. M. T. should ask his question about the *Melodium*, of Alexandre, the maker.

Brief Chronicle of the last Month.

MAIDENHEAD.—The first subscription concert given by the Windsor and Eton Royal Glee Society took place on the 13th ult. As the society is under the immediate patronage of the Queen, Prince Albert, and the Duchess of Kent, the concert was very numerously attended by the surrounding gentry. The vocalists included all the singers in the choir of the Chapel Royal, assisted by Mrs. Henry Barnby; a number of glees and madrigals were performed with extreme correctness and precision. Mr. Knowles presided at the pianoforte.

ST. GEORGE-THE-MARTYR NATIONAL AND INFANT SCHOOLS.—The annual meeting of the parents and friends of the children attending these schools took place on the 26th ult. Several solos and choruses were well executed by the children and their teachers; and a vote of thanks was given to the clergy and the organist, Mr. Barnes, for their kindness in providing this musical treat.

FROME.—The *Messiah* was performed in this town on the 22nd of Dec. by the members of the Choral Society. The fact of this being the first time that the oratorio has ever been given entire at Frome, had the effect of drawing together a very considerable audience, comprising the principal residents in the town and neighbourhood. The singers numbered about fifty voices, who were accompanied by two pianofortes and a harmonium—rather a novel style of accompaniment, but in this case it was highly successful. The solos were sung by amateurs, with the exception of two, which were very well executed by Mr. H. Morgan, of Sherborne. The choruses went admirably, and were sung with great precision and correctness. Mr. Morgan, the conductor, discharged his duties most efficiently, and to him the members are indebted for the degree of perfection to which the society has already attained, and the complete success of their first appearance before the public.

PRESCOT HARMONIC SOCIETY.—This society recommenced its meetings for the present year on the 19th ult., at the Town Hall, under the conduct of Mr. H. W. Burrows. The terms of subscription being little more than nominal, and the music very ably managed, it is probable that the society will soon number a very large body of singers.

LIVERPOOL.—The Festival Choral Society gave their 57th performance on the 9th January, when Handel's *Messiah* was performed. Previous to the oratorio, the Dead March in *Saul* was played in memory of the society's late esteemed and talented conductor, Mr. George Holden. Mr. W. T. Best presided at the organ; Mr. Baetens, led the band; and Mr. Charles B. Herrmann conducted.